

UNRWA demands humanitarian access to Yarmouk

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The UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES (UNRWA) is increasingly concerned at the continued prevention of access for desperately needed humanitarian assistance to Palestinian civilians in Yarmouk. The Syrian authorities and all concerned parties have the power to allow UNRWA to deliver safely humanitarian assistance into Yarmouk, to ease the intense suffering that Palestinian civilians are enduring there. They must exercise this power for the sake of humanity.

Since July this year, in spite of UNRWA's numerous appeals and efforts, Palestinian civilians and others who remain in Yarmouk have had little or no freedom of movement or access to humanitarian assistance. The result is a grave humanitarian situation: in addition to facing death and serious injury from the armed conflict, Yarmouk's civilian residents are exposed to psychological trauma, malnutrition and a lack of health care.

Syrian authorities and all parties must demonstrate that they are willing to take steps to avoid human suffering and are capable of fulfilling their legal obligations to protect civilians. These can be achieved by allowing UNRWA safe access to serve Palestinian civilians inside Yarmouk.

UNRWA's appeals on Yarmouk are consistent with the UN Security Council's Presidential Statement on the humanitarian situation on Syria adopted on 2 October, 2013. Among other stipulations, the Presidential Statement calls on all parties to grant full humanitarian access and to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

With renewed urgency, UNRWA also appeals to all parties to the conflict and to the international community to resolve the conflict in Syria through a peaceful process of mediation and dialogue.

Background

Prior to the armed conflict in Syria, Yarmouk, a suburb just south of Damascus city, was home to over 160,000 Palestine refugees. In December 2012 and in the months since, armed conflict has caused at least 140,000 Palestine refugees to flee their homes in Yarmouk, as armed opposition groups established a presence in the area, with government forces controlling the periphery. Between December 2012 and June 2013, civilians could still access UNRWA assistance at the Zahera entrance to Yarmouk. However, from mid-July 2013, Palestine refugees have been trapped in the area, with little or no access or freedom of movement.

Despite extreme challenges, UNRWA continues to support some 420,000 Palestine refugees in Syria with health care, primary education, cash transfers, food assistance, psycho-social support, access to micro-finance and other humanitarian services.

Background Information:

UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions and financial support has been outpaced by the growth in needs. As a result, the UNRWA programme budget, which supports the delivery of core essential services, operates with a large shortfall. UNRWA encourages all Member States to work collectively to exert all possible efforts to fully fund the Agency's programme budget. UNRWA emergency programmes and key projects, also operating with large shortfalls, are funded through separate funding portals. UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5.4 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA across its five fields of operation. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, protection and microfinance.